

"The suburbs were discovered quite by accident one day in the early 1940's by a Welcome-Wagon lady who was lost. As she stood in a mushy marshland, her sturdy Red Cross shoes sinking into the mire, she looked down, and exclaimed, "It's a septic tank. I've discovered the suburbs!"

Erma Bombeck,

The Grass Is Always Greener
Over The Septic Tank

NEWARK: IT AIN'T DEAD, YET

Alan Zalkind

There have been numerous explanations, studies, hypotheses and speculations concerning the development of suburbs in America. It has been suggested that they are an extension of the medieval mentality which posited that every man (of any worth) was entitled to his own manor land and serfs; or, they may be an extension of the American pioneer spirit - a spirit which perpetually seeks new environments. In any case, two observations are appropriate: One, Mrs. Bombeck's explanation vis-a-vis the growth of suburbs may be as accurate as the most insightful urban planners' and, two, the growth of the suburbs has contributed to the decline of America's cities. Newark has been one of those cities negatively affected by that growth.

Newark, as an American City, represents that which is the worst and the best of America's heritage to the future. Mayor Kenneth Gibson is credited for the statement that "Wherever America's Cities are going, Newark will get there first", and that observation may be prophetic. The economic, commercial,

social and political vitality of Newark experienced radical declines from the 1940's thru the end of the 1960's; this decline culminated in a civil disorder in 1967 which cost the lives of 26 people. Entire sections of the City were devastated and would never be resurrected or reconstructed as they had once existed. One perceptive urban sociologist observed that Newark had become a "reservation" - a reservation which only provided, however, for the physical amalgamation of a large number of people. According to his assessment, this "reservation" existed in the absence of any other unifying characteristics, i.e., no common objectives, the lack of a perceptual "belonging" to a larger community, and the attendant lack of social cohesion. More importantly, the balance between those individuals contributing to the polity and those individuals requiring services from the polity had undergone a negative shift during the past thirty years - the number of those requiring services vastly outnumbered those capable of providing services to themselves. On the basis of these observations, his prognosis for Newark during the 1970's and ensuing years was bleak.

Despite this and other Cassandra-like predictions, Newark did not die. In fact, since 1970, the decline has stabilized and there has been palpable growth and improvements in Newark. Newark is becoming, once again, a center of commercial, educational, cultural, and transportation activities. A renaissance is indeed occurring within the City and this renaissance must be viewed in relation to Gibson's statement. The direction for cities is evident: it is upward. To cite several examples, one could offer the following information vis-a-vis conventional growth indicators in Newark:

HOUSING: Over \$200,000,000 of housing stock has been created or designed since 1970, resulting in the creation of approximately 6,000 new units; in addition, the number of "dilapidated" units declined and the number of "fair" units increased.

EDUCATION: The establishment of the N.J. College of Medicine and Dentistry, Rutgers Graduate School of Criminal Justice and the modernization/expansion of Seton Hall Law School, Essex County College, the Rutgers University School of Law and the New Jersey Institute of Technology during the last eight years have all served to enhance the CBD as an education center. In addition, it has drawn students from through-out the State in the pursuit of their career educational goals. At present, the combined enrollment at these various institutions of higher learning is in excess of 30,000 students. Relative to primary and secondary education, \$51,000,000 has or will be spent in the expansion/renovation of public education facilities since 1970 in a major effort to upgrade these facilities.

HEALTH: There has been a 8% increase in hospital beds in Newark since 1970, and a comprehensive network of neighborhood health centers established. As a result, Newark has experienced sharp declines in infant mortality rate, (e.g. 50%) TB (e.g. 50%) and syphilis (e.g. 80%).

COMMERCE/TRANSPORTATION: Port Newark has become the containerization capital of the world in that it possesses the largest number of berths for containerized shipping; it leads the United States in the conveyance of automobile and meat imports. In addition, in excess of \$30,000,000 has been committed to Newark's economic development. As a result, in excess of 2,000 new jobs were created excluding Public Service employment programs.

CRIME: Since 1970 and 1971 when Newark had the highest crime rate of all major American cities, its position has steadily improved. According to the most recent F.B.I. Crime Reports, it presently ranks 28th of the total 53 major cities. The accuracy of these findings have been supported by the U.S. Census Department's Victimization Surveys taken in 1972 and 1975.

note: additional info. relative to crime added here

This list is not exclusive; time and space only permit the inclusion of the more notable examples of Newark's progress since 1970.

In addition, there are other significant indicators which indicate genuine promise. In June of 1978 the Regional Plan Association (a civic research and advocacy organization) in conjunction with the Tri-State Planning Commission (the official metropolitan planning organization for the interstate urban region of Connecticut, New Jersey and New York) surveyed residents from New Jersey's six largest cities to determine their attitudes about their respective cities. Very significantly, a substantial number of Newark residents, e.g. 51%, rated Newark as either a very or somewhat satisfactory place to live. Significantly, of the six cities surveyed vis-a-vis future expectations, Newark residents were the most positive about the future of their city, e.g. 56% felt that it would get much better or somewhat better during the next five years. It is, in essence, an unblushingly optimistic view of the future.

It is obviously impossible to precisely explain all of the factors which have contributed to the resurgence of Newark. Suffice it to say that six separate elements have come together to the ultimate benefit of the City:

- 1) A large infusion of federal and state resources;
- 2) An effective City administration capable of managing this large influx of funds and also providing expanded services; in addition, an administration capable of generating trust within the business and residential communities;
- 3) An aggressive and responsive business community willing to dedicate private resources to the development/rejuvenation of the City;
- 4) The size of Newark itself, e.g. approximately 350,000 persons, limited conventional problems to a manageable scope. Programs and services could have a tangible impact given a problem of manageable proportions.

- 5) Significant attitudinal changes among Newark's residents; the perception of "belonging" has become increasingly stronger and most importantly, residents have assumed an expanded role in the preservation of Newark. Unlike the "reservation" image alluded to earlier, residents now contribute to the polity, through a variety of affiliations, to a much greater extent than in the past. In essence, an identity has emerged among the City's residents which directly contradict its image outside of the City.
- 6) The existence of substantial natural resources which serve as the foundation for growth, i.e., above-average shipping and transportation facilities, a concentration of educational/cultural services, superb recreational facilities, the existence of a large (and mobile) labor force, et.al.

The purpose of this article, however, is not to belittle nor ignore the problems which still confront Newark; problems which also confront every other major American City and will confront them for the immediate future. The point of this article is to point out legitimate causes for hope, if one considers Newark as a prototype. What is still needed to insure that this prognosis prevails are a sound and comprehensive federal urban policy coupled with a massive re-commitment to cities by large corporations. Both are necessary if we hope to revitalize urban areas. In Newark, the Greater Newark Chamber of Commerce has been very helpful in the latter regard; they have been notably successful in both retaining existing industries and attracting new commerce. Finally, the most essential ingredient within this paradigm is the active, persistent and undiminished interest of the City's present and future inhabitants. In any case, the areas cited above are not the only areas which merit consideration. In a recent article in the Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, Gibson suggested at least two other proposals which would serve to stimulate the growth of cities: 1) to amend "the federal income tax laws to provide for a partial

direct credit for state and local taxes against federal income taxes and
2) to provide the central cities with enough fiscal assistance to allow them to "reduce property taxes, license fees, and other charges imposed on business activities and business revenues." Both of these suggestions must receive serious consideration within a comprehensive federal urban policy if we expect our cities not merely to endure but to flourish as well.

Finally, the indulgence of authorship permits speculation vis-a-vis the future and, despite its inherent risks, I will offer the following predictions concerning the future of our cities:

- 1) America's cities will not die; nor will they be as large or as influential as they were prior to 1940.
- 2) The dialectic process of growth-decline-growth will continue for both city and suburban areas but in an inverse relationship; the growth/decline pattern of each will have an effect on the other. As cities grow, suburban areas will stabilize or grow less rapidly than they have during the past thirty years.
- 3) During the next thirty years, it is very conceivable that cities will demonstrate modified growth patterns unlike their experiences during the past thirty years. It is no longer cheaper to live in the suburbs than in the cities; open areas for new housing construction are not as readily available as heretofore; suburban areas are not essentially safer than urban areas; and, new public policies geared to the rebuilding of urban areas - all of these factors indicate that optimism for our cities neither inappropriate nor, merely, wishful thinking.

Lawrence Ferlinghetti may have said the same thing in many fewer words and much more eloquently in the 1950's as cities were being abandoned when he wrote: "I am waiting . . . I am waiting for a re-birth of wonder/ and I am waiting for someone/ to really discover America/and wait . . ." ("I Am Waiting" from, A Coney Island of the Mind)

It is not too late.